

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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“Industrial Hemp”

Over the past few months I have received many questions on Industrial Hemp, and what the future looks like for Kansas farmers interested in growing it. There are many misconceptions and incorrect information going around about growing Industrial Hemp. So let’s start with some facts.

Last April, the Kansas legislature’s Alternative Crop Research Act was signed into law by then-Gov. Jeff Colyer, allowing the Kansas Department of Agriculture to oversee research into the cultivation of industrial hemp. Industrial hemp is closely controlled by federal and state regulations because it comes from the same cannabis species as marijuana. But instead of getting people high, it is grown for fiber, seed or oil – each of which leads to a variety of end products.

Several questions loom large over this industry, including whether hemp is an agronomic or specialty crop. Industrial hemp is different from marijuana plants that are used for their intoxicating chemical tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Industrial hemp contains little THC at all. Hemp can be used in the manufacture of a wide array of products such as paper, clothing, industrial textiles, insulation, body-care products and much more. Currently, a high-profile use of hemp is for cannabidiol or CBD oil, which is touted as a possible treatment option for a number of health issues. Most of those claims, however, are unsubstantiated because it has been illegal to conduct research until recently.

The 2018 Farm Bill loosens regulations on industrial hemp research and production, removing it from the Controlled Substances Act, thus moving regulation and enforcement from the Drug Enforcement Agency to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Still, to be legal, hemp plants must contain less than 0.3 percent THC content. And any crop that grows incorrectly and ends up “hot” – with a THC level above the limit – must be completely destroyed. Because the 2018 Farm Bill was signed into law in late December and was then followed by a partial government shutdown, KDA began 2019 working from the perspective of the 2014 Farm Bill but with an eye toward the changes in the new federal law – while also working to implement the new state law.

There is much misinformation around industrial hemp and the licensing process as well, let’s go through some of the details. The Industrial Hemp (IH) is a pilot research program, all applications must have a research component. Residents of Kansas who have obtained a license from the Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) can participate in the pilot research program. There are separate licenses (and fees) to grow (\$1,000), distribute (\$2,000), and process (\$3,000 fiber & grain, \$6,000 floral). Fingerprinting and a background check is required. Every person who touches the crop, in any capacity, must be listed on the application and therefore, must be fingerprinted and undergo a background check. Only 80 acres can be grown per license. You can have multiple licenses, each requiring the fee. Only certified varieties of IH on the approved list can be grown, the list is available on the KDA website. No breeding of feral (naturalized) hemp is allowed, only certified approved varieties can be grown. KDA will sample and test

all hemp fields prior to harvest. If THC content exceeds 0.3% of dry matter the crop must be destroyed at the owner's expense. Seed is expensive (\$10-\$20/lb or more) and may be difficult to locate. No data exists evaluating approved varieties for production in Kansas. Currently unknown who or how many processors will be in the state to potentially purchase a crop. No herbicides, insecticides, or fungicides are currently labeled for use on IH.

As extension professionals, we strive to assist farmers with their crop production. Unfortunately, this year will be the first year Kansas State University will be growing industrial hemp just like the farmers we serve. K-State Research and Extension is at the earliest steps in trying to answer questions our farmers may have as they grow industrial hemp for the first time. K-State Research and Extension is working with other universities (such as the University of Kentucky and Cornell University) who are current leaders in Industrial hemp research to better assist our Kansas farmers. K-State's Agriculture research will likely include test plots at the fair center near Wichita, K-State Olathe horticulture center and the Northwest research-extension center in Colby.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.